



Sam Brownback

UNITED STATES SENATOR ■ KANSAS

303 Hart Senate Office Building • Washington DC 20510 • (202) 224-8950

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CONTACT ERIK HOTMIRE

BROWNBACK JOINS COLLEAGUES CONCERNED OVER ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback joined 52 senate colleagues in sending a letter to Dan Glickman, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Text of the letter follows.

“We write to express serious concern with recent comments you have made regarding the payment of income assistance to farmers through the Agriculture Marketing Transition Act (AMTA) payment system.

“In recent weeks, you, other USDA officials, and Office of Management and Budget officials, have criticized plans to distribute income assistance through the AMTA payment mechanism. We have heard comments these payments are going to land owners who have planted no crops or who share no risk in production decisions and management. You have stated that payments should instead be made through a mechanism similar to the Loan Deficiency Payment (LDP) system. You have also argued these payments could be made almost as quickly as through the AMTA payment system.

“Last week Farm Service Agency Associate Administrator for Programs Parks Shackelford, said, ‘all the kings men and all the kings horses’ could not get the payments made as quickly as Congress desires. We remind you that last year when faced with a mid-term election, USDA distributed payments through the AMTA payment mechanism less than three weeks after Congress approved the legislation—actually beginning payments on the date of the election. However, in delivering disaster assistance, through a formula developed by the Department, it took producers more than 7 months to receive payments. Experience thus shows that USDA cannot create a new payment mechanism that will make these payments as quickly as through AMTA.

“Several members of your staff recently briefed members of the House Agriculture Committee staff on this issue. Based upon those discussions and recent public comments, it is clear that no formal plan for making these payments has been developed. Furthermore, you have clearly indicated that payments should be based upon a producer’s actual production because the producer is the one truly suffering from low prices.

“We respectfully ask, are producers who lost their crops due to hail, disease, and drought, or flooding in better financial condition than those producers who had crops to harvest in 1999? There have been indications that USDA might base such payments on a NASS state average yield for 1999 or on a five-year production average that producers would have to prove. As you know, wide discrepancies can occur in yields from one region of a state to another. Is telling producers they will receive payments

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based upon 'their actual production yields' providing a false hope if you actually intend to use 1999 state averages or five-year average yields? Why not use the current AMTA system where producers and lenders know exactly what their payments will be—rather than re-inventing the wheel?

“Mr. Secretary, we are also concerned with your comments that payments will be made to producers who planted no crop this year. In comments last Friday, you indicated these payments are being made on many acres that are no longer planted to crops but rather have been switched over to pasture and grassland. Yet, in recent months, the Department and some members of Congress have indicated that we need to look at production and/or acreage controls because farmers have planted 'fence row-to-fence row' under the 1996 Farm Bill. These comments and your most recent comments on Friday seem to indicate a conflicting understanding of the issues.

“Finally, we are deeply concerned with your comments arguing that in many instances, AMTA payments are going to those who share no risk in farm production. The 1996 Farm Bill clearly states that payments can only be made to those who 'assume all or part of the risk of producing a crop.' Mr. Secretary, if payments are indeed being made to those who share no risk in production, it is a clear violation of the law, and we would request proper disciplinary action for any official approving of payments in an illegal manner.

“Mr. Secretary, our concerns are great. We believe producers deserve an efficient federal response to their problems. We ask that you review your position and support those mechanisms that will get payments to producers in the quickest, most efficient way possible.”

Brownback signed the letter with 52 other senators. The signers were U.S. Sens. Roberts, Grassley, Craig, Grams, Burns, Hagel, Allard, Coverdell, Lugar, Kay Bailey Hutchison, Tim Hutchinson, Enzi, Thurmond, Cochran, Domenici, Stevens, Shelby, Bennet, Helms, Jeffords, McConnell, Thomas, Ashcroft, Gordon Smith, Bob Smith, Campbell, Mack, Gorton, Lott, Bond, Fitzgerald, Crapo, Bunning, Sessions, Dewine, Thompson Collins, Inhofe, Kyle, Warner, Specter, Snowe, Voinovich, Breaux, Baucus, Murkowski, Hatch, Landrieu, Gregg, Santorum, Nickles, and Bob Kerrey.